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Community Selection and Responses

A Study of Issues and Solutions

The NWFP Community Infrastructure Project

South Asia Region



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Case Study

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The Water and Sanitation Program began on the initiative of the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and fifteen bilateral cooperation agencies during the International Decade of Potable Water and Environmental Sanitation in the eighties. With its participation in more than twenty-eight countries, the Program supports national and local efforts to help communities of scarce resources obtain sustainable access to improved water and sanitation services.

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Listing of Acronyms

CAP – Community Action Plan

CIP – Community Infrastructure Project

LGE&RD – Local Government Election & Rural Development Department

M&E – Monitoring and Evaluation

MIS – Management Information System

MNA – Member of National Assembly

MPA – Member of Provincial Assembly

NWFP – North West Frontier Province

PC-1 – Planning Commission Proforma 1

P&CD – Planning & Community Development

PHED – Public Health Engineering Department

PM – Process Monitoring

PMU – Project Management Unit

SC – Steering Committee

SDC – Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

UNDP – United Nations Development Program

Executive Summary

In a community-based and demand-led project, the appropriateness (to participate in the project) of the communities identified and selected, the relevance of selection criteria, and the project's ability to be flexible and adaptive in responding to community demand and priorities, has important consequences for the success or failure of the facilities provided by the project. Effective social mobilization plays a pivotal role in improving the community's understanding of the project rules, the project's potential benefits, their sense of ownership and eventually the sustainability of facilities provided.

The Study has shown that ambiguities in project rules, the drive for ambitious targets, and unbalanced resource allocation, lead to compromising the quality of community mobilization. This affects the ability of the project to respond to the true needs of the community, and may eventually result in the loss of community confidence. If project monitoring systems are not in place, such issues might not be identified in a timely manner,

leading to the waste of significant resources invested by both government and communities.

An important issue highlighted by the Study is the need for consistent sector policies based on a clear set of rules, to allow demand led projects to operate effectively without competing with others which employ subsidies.

This Study is based on the experience with a new type of monitoring, **Process Monitoring** carried out in collaboration with the Project Management Unit (PMU), and focuses on key lessons learnt during community selection and scheme identification in the Community Infrastructure Project (CIP). It documents how the Project has adapted as a result of Process Monitoring, and how project rules have been refined to improve and enhance the participatory and demand driven elements. The study indicates that the CIP experience is likely to both stimulate a debate on sector policies, and influence the development of such policies.

Background

In 1996 the Government of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) initiated, with financial assistance from the World Bank and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the Community Infrastructure Project (CIP); an innovative, demand-driven project expected to benefit some 400,000 people in 55 urban and rural communities in the province over a period of 5 years. Coordinated by the Local Government, Elections and Rural Development Department (LGE&RD), the Project is implemented by a Project Management Unit (PMU).

Given the new patterns of interaction between communities and government, SDC agreed to support Process Monitoring (PM) as a way of monitoring key project processes. It was hoped that PM would generate timely qualitative and quantitative information which would be communicated to and influence the decisions of project management and result in changes in project processes which would improve project implementation.

CIP employs participatory, demand-driven strategies to identify needs and upgrade infrastructure in poor urban and rural communities. This includes investments in water supply, drainage, flood protection, streets and footpaths, sanitation, solid waste management and community facilities. Diverging considerably from traditional supply-driven approaches, and operating in an unclear policy environment, CIP is being closely observed by both supporters and detractors.

The Project is being implemented in 4 phases covering 12 communities in Phase I, 14 communities each in Phases II and III, with 15 communities covered in Phase IV. While the number of communities covered in each phase is limited, and communities have to be prioritized, eligible communities may also be included in a later phase. The project cycle in each community consists of

- i. identification,
- ii. preparation,
- iii. confirmation,
- iv. implementation and
- v. operation and maintenance.

A recurring issue has been the inherent tension between meeting the Project's physical targets and managing sometimes complex community processes. A high rate of community "drop out" (i.e. selected communities which are later excluded from implementation), was noticed early in the Project, and was a cause of considerable concern. A drop out rate of 37 percent (7 out of 19) in Phase I and 48 percent (16 out of 33) in Phase II was observed. Clearly, there were problems with the way in which communities were selected. The "drop out" issue was of particular interest to the Project, since it relates to the critical processes of scheme/community identification and selection, the appropriateness of the criteria employed, and other key aspects of the social mobilization process.

Summary of Findings

By using PM to monitor the community selection process, several problems were detected. Some of the main ones were:

1. Ambiguity in project rules and lack of clarity in communicating rules related to identification and selection to both staff and communities
2. Inappropriate community selection criteria
3. Lack of complementarity between and weaknesses in the technical and social feasibility assessments
4. Bureaucratic procedures leading to delays in physical implementation
5. Presence of other programs and projects with "softer" eligibility criteria
6. Inconsistent and unclear policy environment
7. Community conflicts

The first three problems are due to shortcomings in Project rules and processes. Improving these rules and processes could lower the drop-out rate and ensure that communities are effectively mobilized and valuable resources not wasted. Examples of Project rules which remain unclear are those related to the presence of existing infrastructure in a community (community selection criteria indicate that a community should lack basic infrastructure, but there is no clarity regarding the extent of infrastructure which might be present) and targeting low income communities (there are no clear criteria regarding what might constitute a "poor" community). An important issue relates to the lack of clarity amongst Project staff regarding rules and selection criteria, which might result in the selection of communities which are not eligible according to the rules. Moreover, communities are also not

clear about selection criteria, and their own eligibility.

The fourth problem, while not entirely in the Project's control, could be partly solved by a more effective way to assess community suitability and readiness to participate in the Project. Communities with greater commitment and need are less likely to lose their enthusiasm and to endure the long wait before physical implementation commences.

The fifth and sixth issues relate to an inconsistent policy environment, and the presence of other programs and projects which may offer subsidies and "softer" eligibility terms. Communities are more likely to wait for these programs, unless demand is very strong. If these soft programs exist in parallel to a project whose rules include cost-sharing, it can

undermine its objectives. A dialogue at the policy level is important to ensure that a more consistent policy environment is adopted with respect to subsidies and participatory approaches.

The last issue identified, relates to the effectiveness of the selection process in responding to true "community" demand, and the Project's capacity to build awareness and mobilize communities. At times applications have been submitted by one or small groups of individuals without the consensus of the community. As the entire community has to contribute 20 percent of the capital cost of community infrastructure, their lack of involvement at this stage can lead to internal community conflicts. As CIP communities are large (with populations of several thousand), they comprise of diverse groups, and may lack the cohesion of smaller communities. Effective social mobilization can address some social conflicts, but others might be beyond the capacity and mandate of the Project to address.

Scheme Identification & Selection Rules

Communities can participate in the Project if they have at least 500 households or a population above 3000, low-income status, i.e. less than Rs. 2,000/month/household; lack of basic infrastructure; and if they are willing to contribute 20 percent of the cost of secondary and tertiary infrastructure (i.e. community infrastructure).

During Phase I, communities were often selected directly by the Project on an ad hoc basis, resulting in an externally-driven relationship with the communities. In this Phase 19 communities were identified, out of which 7 were later excluded, a drop-out rate of 37 percent. Two communities were excluded for not meeting the selection criteria, 4 due to lengthy procedures/competing programs, and one community lost interest and dropped out itself.

Using findings from PM, the Project revised its community identification and selection strategy. In Phase II, advertisements were placed in newspapers, which made the process more transparent and allowed communities to express demand through "applying" for participation in the Project.

As a result of this new "communication" strategy, 150 communities applied from all parts of the province. After an initial screening, 33 communities were recommended to the Project's Steering Committee (SC). Following approval by the SC, the preparation stage began. An early drop out of 3 communities at

the preparation stage was, however, evidence of further shortcomings in the community selection process. As the SC, which is expected to meet quarterly, only met very irregularly, Project staff would have to rush to prepare for these irregular and unscheduled meetings. As the SC has the authority to approve the selection of communities, Project staff have rushed to prepare lists for the SC meetings which are planned in an ad hoc manner. Such short-cuts have led to the recommendation of ineligible communities.

In the absence of a functional M&E and MIS system the Project did not have a way to identify problems or diagnose the reasons for them. Through diagnostic discussions with the PM Team, the Project's Planning & Community Development (P&CD) Directorate identified the main causes of "drop-out" as: inadequate technical/financial feasibility, scattered settlement patterns and poor coordination between government line departments.

The Project responded to PM observations and recommendations by revising their procedures and sending an advance team consisting of a Planner, Assistant Director and Social Organizers to visit some communities. This 'team' visited 30 communities, which resulted in the completion of 14 Community Action Plans (CAPs) and the dropout of 16 communities; 2 due to competing programs, 3 because of failure to meet selection criteria (on detailed field verification), 9 due to lack of technical, social and/or financial feasibility, and 2 communities lost interest and dropped out

themselves. It was found on investigation that due to planning and staffing constraints the entire team rarely visited the field; often part of the team or only one individual would visit communities.

second phase suffered from lack of attention to important technical feasibility issues, with technical staff not being involved in the selection process. *This highlights the importance of coordination between social and technical aspects of a project.*

Table I: Community Drop-out status by Project Phase

	Project stage	Nos. of communities applied	Nos. of communities Selected	Nos. of communities dropped	percentage of dropped communities
Phase I	Preparation & Confirmation	-	19	7	37
Phase II	Identification & Preparation	150	33	16	48

Surprisingly, the drop-out rate in Phase II was even higher than in Phase I, despite using a transparent approach in selection/identification. This appears to be counter-intuitive, but further analysis highlighted the importance of a coordinated social and technical assessment. The problem actually arose from the fact that technical assessments were not carried out.

The difference in the dropout rate in the two phases can be attributed to the fact that in Phase I, technical feasibility studies were conducted by engineers while in Phase II

In phase-II the community identification team visited 33 communities (short listed from the list of 150 communities who applied) scattered throughout the Province. Unfortunately, time and staff constraints resulted in a hurried and superficial analysis. The pressure of physical targets, lack of coordination between social and technical units of the Project, and the fact that the community development unit was not fully staffed and equipped, affected the quality of the community identification and selection process.

Table II: Reason for Community Drop-out

	Restrictions in Selection Criteria (percent)	Technical/Social Feasibility (percent)	Lengthy Procedures/Competing Programs (percentage)	Community Choice (percent)
Phase I	29	-	57	14
Phase II	19	55	13	13

communities were largely identified by a single Community Development Advisor from the TA consultants, with some assistance from the community development section, and without the help of technical feasibility studies. While in the first phase community development staff were not fully on board and selection was undertaken by traditional engineering staff, with little attention to critical social analysis, the

The community's perceptions of the causes of drop-out or exclusion often differed considerably from those of the Project. This failure to understand and communicate effectively with communities resulted in confusion and frustration among both community members and Project staff. It was plain that the problem could be solved by developing more participatory strategies and

providing the resources (staff & logistics) to establish better and more continuous contact with the communities. The contact methodologies (in one large formal meeting) employed, were not the best mechanism for raising awareness and communicating effectively with the community. Again, the time and resource constraints, combined with a lack of understanding of and poor training in participatory methodologies, resulted in the Project adopting this less than satisfactory methodology.

An analysis of the principal causes of "drop out" follows.

particularly affects communities where difficult physical conditions mean higher costs and more complex projects, as for example in the southern part of the Province (where there is also a higher incidence of poverty).

The community is expected to pay 20 percent of the cost of community works. In Inzerbanda and Chakra the communities met all other selection criteria and were willing to pay up to 40 instead of the required 20 percent share of community works. However, rules on the ratios of costs of primary and secondary infrastructure, which were interpreted as being inflexible by Project staff, did not allow these communities to participate in the Project.

Table III: Drop-out due to Identification / Selection Strategy and Selection Criteria

Issues Related to Strategy / Selection Criteria	Phase I (Drop out)	Phase II (Drop out)
No of communities	2	3
Percent	29	19
Reasons Identified	Inflexible rules on primary and community infrastructure and lack of clarity on role of existing infrastructure in determining community eligibility	Inflexible rules on primary and community infrastructure

a) Limitations in Identification / Selection Strategy and Selection Criteria

Project rules on the ratio of costs of primary and community works are a critical issue. Primary works are trunk infrastructure (e.g. main roads, tube wells etc) and require a high degree of technical expertise to execute. These are being implemented through contractors. Community works include simpler works such as street pavement, drainage etc. These are being implemented by the community themselves (it should be noted that communities are not paid the standard 15 percent profit that contractors are paid to execute works, due to government rules). Rules state that the cost of primary works should be about 50 percent of the cost of community works. This rule limits the nature and scope of primary works that can be undertaken, thus disqualifying certain communities who require a certain amount of primary work to be undertaken in their sub-project. This

Lack of clarity on such rules, poor documentation and poor communication meant that obligations and responsibilities remained unclear to both Project staff and community. This resulted in the exclusion of a number of communities, who with a slightly more flexible interpretation of rules, might have been good candidates for participation. Such communities either opted out (as they were only interested in a certain mix of infrastructure) or were not selected. Communities willing to participate and share costs, for example, were excluded due to existing infrastructure (e.g. Teri, Hazar Khani). However, drop-outs due to selection criteria did decrease somewhat in Phase II, (19 percent compared to 29 percent in Phase I), mainly due to better information and clarification of rules on existing infrastructure.

b) Weak Technical and Social Feasibility

During Phase I, communities were identified by engineering teams, and drop-out on technical grounds was limited.

infrastructure could not be implemented at reasonable cost.

The remaining 2 communities (28 percent) dropped out due to lack of effective social mobilization and the unwillingness of the communities to contribute 20 percent of the

Table IV: Drop-out due to Weak Technical and Social Feasibility

Technical, Social and Financial Causes	Phase I	Phase II
No of Communities	0	9
Percent	0	56
Comments	-	No technical feasibility at the time of identification, rapid urbanization negatively affecting community cohesiveness

In Phase II, the communities were mobilized only by community development staff, who selected communities on the basis of social aspects. Surprisingly, the major causes of community drop-out during Phase II included social and cost factors in addition to technical issues. Drop out on the basis of technical issues is not surprising due to the lack of participation of the technical staff during community identification and selection. Out of 9 communities 7 (78 percent) were excluded for technical reasons such as physical characteristics (topography, settlement patterns, etc.) and financial factors which meant that the

cost of community works. In the early phases of the Project, the Project's field staff, due to lack of proper logistics and skills, were not able to inform and motivate the communities adequately. Some communities were visited only once in up to two years. Lack of continuity in contacts with communities remains a critical shortcoming of the Project's social mobilization process. Overall, this is also indicative of inherent weaknesses in the process of social mobilization as designed and executed.

Social Mobilization in Large Communities

An issue related to effective social mobilization is the difficulty of mobilizing very large communities. With CIP communities, the rule is that the community must consist of several thousand individuals. To ensure equal participation from all households, therefore, is a daunting task, particularly with the resource and staffing constraints faced by the Project Management Unit, and the strategies currently employed. Such large communities lack the social cohesion of smaller ones. To effectively hold dialogues and carry out participatory planning in such large mass meetings is also difficult. This means that only a small group of people take active part in project planning, while the majority of the community remains unaware of what the Project offers and on what conditions. This "awareness gap" negatively influences community mobilization. This gap also has implications for the operation and maintenance of the installed infrastructure, which requires cohesive, effective community organizations and broad community awareness. A key lesson which emerges, therefore, is that interaction with smaller units based on existing social structures within the large community and the use of more participatory tools and methodologies could improve the effectiveness of social mobilization.

c) Bureaucratic Procedures, Delayed Implementation and Competing Programs

Communities also dropped out because of the long wait they had to undergo due to lengthy bureaucratic procedures, delayed implementation and competing programs offered by other departments. Once the community agrees to the project and detailed designs are prepared, these details have to be prepared in the form of yet another project document which is required by government (the PC-1). This is then approved by the Planning and Development Department. Both the preparation of the PC-1 and its approval take time, and this process has constituted a major bottleneck. There is consequently a considerable delay in physical implementation. Communities, who have often not been informed of this additional step, are unable to understand the causes of delay, and lose confidence in the intention and ability of the Project to deliver what has been agreed. Communities who are often not effectively "motivated" to start with, therefore lose interest and give up, or look for other ways to improve their community's infrastructure.

The Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) and Members of National and Provincial Assemblies (MNA/MPA) have programs which may provide the same facilities as the Project, but without a community contribution. Since these programs offer "easier" terms, they are far more attractive to the community. Where a neighboring community

can obtain "free" infrastructure, the incentive to contribute to costs is undermined.

This illustrates that while options and varied approaches should certainly be available to communities, they should not be so fundamentally different in policy as to undermine the core objective of sustainability. An inconsistent policy environment, which allows for programs and projects with widely divergent and inconsistent rules can have a significant negative impact on innovative projects which are attempting to apply demand driven approaches.

Lack of coordination between CIP and other line agencies (departments), particularly at the early stages of the project cycle often leads to duplicate or overlapping facilities being planned and implemented in the same community. While the community may be quite happy to keep different options open, the initiation of similar works by different departments in the same community can result in considerable waste of not only resources, but also of time. As departments rarely coordinate, poorly planned and disconnected systems might be put in place, leading to even greater issues at a later stage.

Table V: Drop-out due to Government Procedures and Competing Programs

Procedures/Competing Programs	Phase I (Drop out)	Phase II (Drop out)
No.	4	2
Percent	57	13
Reasons	Competing programs, lengthy procedures, cost-sharing rules, lack of coordination between agencies	

In Ahmedabad, a community from Phase I, willingness to participate and enthusiasm was so high that both men and women met together in the same forum to participate in training provided by the Project, not an insignificant occurrence in a traditionally gender-segregated culture. Unfortunately, the Project later dropped this community due to lack of interest (which diminished dramatically during the long wait for things to happen), and competing PHED programs. Had the Project not delayed, the community would have had the confidence to continue with the CIP, rather than turn to the PHED. The drop out of such communities with significant interest is a serious problem for the Project.

These factors were addressed to some extent in Phase II, and dropout rates were reduced. This is an important indication of the Project's willingness to adapt in response to critical feedback from PM. It is also proof of adjustment and course correction. One of the measures that the Project undertook was to liaise with government line agencies and other programs at the identification stage, resulting in greatly improved coordination.

d) Community "Deselecting" Itself - Internal Social Conflicts

Community drop out due to internal, non-project related factor is the least common cause i.e. one community in Phase I and 3 in Phase II.

The main reasons for this are unwillingness of the broad community to participate in the Project (e.g. Darakai), inability or unwillingness

to contribute 20 percent of the cost, or internal social conflicts (Yark and Bazid Khail).

The first cause relates to the effectiveness of the social mobilization process. Effective community mobilization would have detected if demand was expressed by all segments of the community, or by a small or influential group. In Darakai PM observations indicated that the community had limited awareness of the Project, despite apparently thorough contacts with the community. The PM team observed that the technique for determining community priorities relied on formal questionnaires administered to individual heads of household, and on a very limited number of formal community meetings. The effectiveness of contact with the community could be improved through the application of more participatory activities (more contact with the community using smaller fora and participatory methodologies) and fewer pre-designed, structured techniques. Clearly mechanisms for successfully capturing *community demand*, as opposed to individual demand, are important and require improvement

Where communities are not cohesive and/or are not willing to accept project rules, participatory social mobilization and Process Monitoring can play a useful role. Even then, negotiations can fail, and the Project must be prepared to accept a certain number of "failures". In the process, the Project can develop clear exit criteria.

Table VI: Drop-out due to Community Factors

Community Opting Out	Phase I (Drop out)	Phase II (Drop out)
No of Communities	1	2
Percent	14	13
Reasons	CBO dominated by small number of influential individuals; bulk of community not aware of, and not in agreement with Project terms	One community was willing to participate, but due to internal conflicts were unable to agree on priorities and contributions One community was unable to contribute 20 percent of the capital cost

Key Lessons

- Clearly stated project rules and a proper understanding of these rules (selection criteria, rules for scheme identification and prioritization) by both project staff and communities and the correct application of these rules, are essential ingredients of project success. Problems posed by both inadequate or inappropriate understanding of rules, and the rigidity of the rules themselves, negatively affected the Project. For example, inflexible rules regarding the ratios of primary, secondary and tertiary infrastructure (i.e. community infrastructure and primary systems) allowed, prevented the Project from responding to communities who were willing to contribute more than required for a different mix of infrastructure. A community might demand a greater amount of primary infrastructure for example, and be willing to pay a greater percentage of the capital cost (than 20 percent) for corresponding community infrastructure. Thus an opportunity to introduce an element of competition between communities was lost because of rigid project rules.
- Coordination and complementarity between social and technical assessments is critical for project success. The quality of social mobilization has important repercussions for scheme identification and selection, and community development units in the project need to be properly staffed and functional.
- To prevent loss of credibility due to delays in physical implementation resulting from lengthy government procedures, these procedures must be streamlined. Communities must be effectively and sufficiently motivated, well aware and clear about rules and the terms of the partnership, obligations, and reasons for possible delays.
- Coordination and consistent policies and strategies are required between government line departments and projects to prevent duplication and wastage of resources and inconsistent messages to communities.
- An M&E system should include process indicators and mechanisms for timely feedback to project management and identify remedial actions to allow problems to be addressed at the right time.

Conclusions & Recommendations

The CIP is a new generation project, which has the flexibility of not building infrastructure where there is no genuine demand from the users, demonstrated by willingness to pay.

To effectively capture and build on such demand, social mobilization must be closely coordinated and sequenced with technical aspects. An innovative, community-based project must also have the flexibility to respond and adapt to the communities' real needs and feedback regarding the effectiveness of project rules and processes.

In this case the Project responded very positively to critical issues emerging from Process Monitoring, however the response has often been affected by the bureaucracy within which it works and rigid rules. The Project was not able to bypass these rules, despite having special powers delegated to it in the Project agreement. The presence of a fully functional M&E unit could have helped the Project identify and address potential problems in a more timely and effective manner.

The importance of a parallel policy dialogue to ensure consistent policies in the sector, based on a clear set of rules, must also be highlighted. For the implementation of a community based approach, one of the key factors is a consistent policy framework for development in the area. The presence of programs with subsidies, for example, proved a negative incentive to participating in cost-sharing, in some instances. The CIP

experience is likely to play a significant role in determining such sector policies.

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